

Posted by u/Alyksandur 3 hours ago

Dishonorable Combat (or Why Humans Fight Dirty)

OC OC

(Author's note: Same setting as the other stories Waffle will mention below. Measurements and most timescales converted to «human readable» for ease of reading.)

To: The Council of the Galactic Collective Community

Re: Consideration of GCC retribution against the Terrans for dishonorable conduct in warfare

Esteemed Council:

I recommend against this course of action, and lack sufficient vocabulary to express just how unwise an idea I consider it to be.

Not everyone has the same idea of what constitutes “honorable combat”, and that alone has caused more than a few of the bloodier wars in the galaxy. It has been said that the deathworlders of the Orion Tetrad, and most especially the Terrans, are notoriously dishonorable fighters, with some races comparing them to unprincipled barbarians or bullies and thugs. This is not the case. It is not that their sense of honor is lacking, it just runs along different lines than the galactic norm.

One of the more frequent notions of honor that comes up in galactic warfare is the concept of a fair fight, where everybody's forces are more or less evenly matched — or at least equivalent, in the case of the Zindyr Overhive or the Fnikt'thee. A part of that fair fight mentality is that everybody knows where everybody else is. Stealth is generally looked upon as a tactic employed by cowards and sub-sapient animals.

Humans operate under the premise that wars are meant to be won, not to show off some intangible concept like moral superiority. They will absolutely employ such tactics as stealth, along with any other means of gaining advantages, which can range from intercepting transmissions to sensor jamming, no matter how underhanded it may seem to the galaxy at large. Stealth is simply a matter of course for humans, and they carry the idea of remaining unseen to the extent of sniping from ranges beyond what their foes are capable of detecting. In those cases where a head-on engagement is unavoidable, they can be expected to show up with as large a force as can be mustered, regardless of the force fielded by their enemies. As we Mré found out «firsthand», humans believe that if you go into a war in the hopes of a fair fight, you're doing it wrong.

As a particular case in point of the above, the first of their wars with the Ptagoi was on the surface of a largely insignificant planet in the «GJ 674» system. The humans had laid claim to the world for mining purposes and had also already begun construction of

a resupply depot and a small military installation for planetary defense purposes. The Ptagoi had known of the planet's existence for «centuries» but never laid claim to it, noting that it would be useless to most races for colonization without ever considering such matters as its potential resources. They contested the claim with the GCC, but you upheld the Terran claim.

This left military seizure as the Ptagoi's only means of taking the planet. They formally declared war against the Terrans and announced that they would meet their force at a designated time and location to begin. The humans responded with an artillery strike on the location at the designated time, following up by initiating an infantry charge that included assault rifles and a handful of laser weapons to mop up any survivors, with the infantry backed up by close air support that proved entirely unnecessary.

The Ptagoi condemned the action as dishonorable and pleaded their case to the GCC. The humans countered that they had broken no formal galactic protocols. The GCC determined that, distasteful though their tactics were, the Terrans were correct.

This is not to say that humans are incapable of fighting fair. Some conflicts are resolved in a sort of ritualized combat, and some of those have even grown into sports of some form or another. While cheating is a not infrequent problem in some fashion, there are always penalties and sanctions that can be taken against those caught breaking the rules — sometimes even within the event itself rather than its aftermath. They do understand the concept of a fair fight and are even willing to enforce it. If lives are at stake, however, there are few depths humans will not stoop to in order to win.

Humans do have rules for warfare, however, alien though some of them are to a sizable portion of the galaxy. The one which is easiest to run afoul of is, by far, that noncombatants are strictly off-limits. Accidents and collateral damage are considered to be acceptable, however grudgingly, but expected to be kept to the barest possible minimum. This flies in the face of more than a few galactic traditions, not the least of whom included the now isolationist Rzqvokth, for whom standard operating procedure was to simply glass the offending planet.

One of the primary statements in the Vastruuri Accords, under which the Orion Tetrad and several of their closest allies operate, stipulates a ban on the use of weapons on a scale which will damage a significant portion of an inhabited planet. Failure to comply with this clause — even if the signatory is attacking a non-signatory — will result in immediate expulsion from the Vastruuri Accords unless done in retaliation to an attack of similar scale. One of the main reasons for this is the possible effect of such an attack on civilians, and the Accords note that such force against purely military sites is permissible. In broader terms, however, the Accords forbid attacks that will cause extensive harm to civilians, and specifically targeting noncombatants is forbidden.

During the ground war with the lystna, the lystna made a habit of attacking medical personnel near the end of the conflict. The excessive response by the Terran forces resulted in a ceasefire wherein the lystna were informed in no uncertain terms that such behavior would under no circumstances be tolerated. The lystna, having noted their own distinct lack of human-inflicted noncombatant casualties even in the wake of the intensified assaults, offered a formal apology and promised to avoid such targets when the ceasefire expired. This ceasefire has currently lasted for over «thirty-eight years», though the two races are still

technically at war as a formal peace treaty has yet to be ratified. Also worth mention is the fact that the Iystna have been signatories of the Vastruuri Accords for «nearly thirty-five» years.

One of the biggest sticking points in the policy toward noncombatants, however, includes prisoners, whether during the war or following its conclusion. Many races have no compunctions against torturing prisoners during times of war for reasons from personal gratification to gathering information — which, in fact, some races consider to be the only proper means of gaining intel on their enemies, as opposed to some of the spying techniques humans are known for. Postwar prisoners are often treated poorly; execution is common, and often one of the more merciful fates awaiting prisoners. The winners of wars almost universally feel that they are entitled to treat their prisoners however they see fit.

Prisoners taken by humans, however, are generally treated reasonably well, or at the very least not mistreated. They cannot expect luxury, naturally, but the conditions in which they are kept are at least livable and they can expect to be fed and kept healthy. Indeed, wounded prisoners are given proper medical treatment for their injuries whenever possible. Interrogations are common, but rarely violent. Not even prisoners who are guilty of particularly heinous acts (by human standards, that is) are often subjected to physical or psychological abuse by their guards, and they are by far more likely to be summarily executed than tortured. Postwar prisoners are almost nonexistent save for the occasional high-ranking military officer or political figure, and even those are often eventually released in exchange for some sort of diplomatic concession.

Another point of honor for humans is not just who they are allowed to kill in battle, but how they may do so. Any weapon that is specifically designed to inflict excessive pain, suffering, or indignity before death is certain to gain their ire, and they frown on deliberately using even more conventional weapons in such a fashion. Many races consider such attacks to be a means of showing that they have more honor than those on the receiving end, who often act in dishonorable ways in the throes of death. Humans, however, believe that to bring dishonor of this manner to one's enemies is to bring dishonor to oneself. One of the few major changes to the Vastruuri Accords came at the behest of the Terrans after a Vastruuri force fell victim to an exceptionally horrific bioweapon.

These “misplaced values”, in your words, are not unique to humans, nor are their tactics. Many deathworlders have similar values and have been criticized for using similar strategies, though few so effectively as the Terrans. Allow me to summarize the reasoning behind the most common deathworlder mentality — including the Terrans' — on warfare.

Earth is a deathworld. Most of their closest allies are deathworlders as well. Their evolution emphasized survival. They fight dirty because they had to simply to survive, and that imperative is genetically ingrained in them. Their very evolution demands that they value few things more highly than life. Their soldiers are fully aware that they may give their own so that those they fight for may keep theirs, and this helps to explain part of why they consider attacking noncombatants so unforgivable. Furthermore, on a world where death comes so easily, they insist upon a life not spent in fearing for survival but one of dignity. This is also the reason why they place great value on their inevitable death having, if not meaning, then at least that same dignity.

A human can accept death, particularly their own. The evolution of their species means they understand its inescapability, but to borrow one of their idioms, they do not go gentle into that good night. They will do what they need to survive, and even more to ensure those they protect can live in peace. Where others in the GCC fight wars in ways meant to preserve their honor and with the intent to kill their enemies, humans do not. Their goal is, as it ever has been, to survive.

If that requires measures other races in the GCC would scorn? The Terrans will have no shame in making that your problem, not theirs.

Respectfully,

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